



Making Room for Women Project

Interview with Susan Lindenberger

August 29th, 2020



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Oral History Recording Summary

Interviewee: Susan Lindenberger

Interviewed by: Katherine Gear Chambers

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Auditor of Transcription: Susan Lindenberger

Time Log (minutes)	Description of Content
00:01	Beginning of interview, introduction, permission
00:24	Early involvement in the church, growing up and church in Virginia, parents very oriented towards civil rights and social justice
07:38	Coming to Canada, volunteer work with World Council of Churches, Girl Scouts, Brownies
08:35	Work with First Nations, Alberni Indian Residential School trial lunches, button dress
13:41	Woodward's squat
16:14	Focused on defeating Trump, gender inequality, sexual abuse case and its effects
28:12	Work within the church, Director of Education in US churches
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44:40	Decline in membership in the church, COVID-19, family, Trumpism as similar to Nazism
54:43	Work that she's proud of, civil rights movement in the '60s in the US and the South Carolina Conference
1:02:42	The community and solidarity with women in the United Church, the effects of the sexual abuse case

- 1:07:45 Influence of class, race, sexual orientation on life and church involvement
- 1:18:50 Other role models
- 1:24:54 Jim (husband) standing by her through everything
- 1:28:28 Final comments, good-byes

Susan Lindenberger

1:28:45

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

church, people, laughter, spoke, women, garbled, questions, called, conference, Blacksburg, united, Dunbar, important, support, understand, stood, community, feel, Virginia, touch

SPEAKERS

Katherine Gear Chambers, Susan Lindenberger

Katherine Gear Chambers 00:00

Today is Saturday. Is it August 29th? August 29 today. Time flies. I'm Katherine Gear Chambers, and I'm joined here with Susan Lindenberger for the Making Room for Women Project. Susan, do I have your permission to proceed with this interview?

Susan Lindenberger 00:23

Absolutely.

Katherine Gear Chambers 00:24

Thank you very much. So can you just start off by telling us a little bit about your early life, your family, your community and your participation in the church?

Susan Lindenberger 00:33

Okay, I was born in 1941 in Charlottesville, Virginia, which has become notorious in recent years for the racism. I spent five years in South Carolina and then we moved back to my father's hometown Blacksburg, Virginia, where he was Presbyterian minister at three churches. My mother was a preacher's kid who was trained as a botanist. And after we were in high school and college, she went back to teaching botany at two of the local colleges, and ended up being the 88-year-old herbarium/botany person at Virginia Tech (Virginia Polytechnic Institute).

Katherine Gear Chambers 01:28

Oh, wow.

Susan Lindenberger 01:29

Yeah, so I've got big boots to fill.

Katherine Gear Chambers 01:33

It's quite a career.

Susan Lindenberger 01:34

Dad was very active in getting women ordained as elders. And then both of them were very active in civil rights work in Virginia. And dad, when he was 90, showed support for the gay ordination, as it was then in Virginia. So lots to live up to.

Katherine Gear Chambers 02:01

Yeah. So you were raised in a home that was very oriented towards social justice?

Susan Lindenberger 02:06

Absolutely. Social justice, the church, and nature, and the extended family – at least on my mother's side – the extended family was very important. And I'm still in touch with cousins to the nth degree.

Katherine Gear Chambers 02:20

Oh, that's beautiful. Were there ways in your upbringing that those values of justice, and the church, and nature sort of all blended together? Ways that they could overlap and meet?

Susan Lindenberger 02:32

Well, they overlap in the United Church's new creed, which to me, was just an absolute – I fell in love with it, particularly after they added respect for creation. Just at the time we moved here, I was struggling with whether I wanted... I was finding I was questioning many of the basic tenets of Christianity that I was raised with. And the United Church, and particularly that creed, and a course with Lloyd Gaston and Bill Crockett at VST [Vancouver School of Theology], just gave me a picture of the broad span of theologies that Christianity has held since the beginning. And that let me find a place – a changing place, but a place.

Katherine Gear Chambers 03:21

So the transition for you from American faith communities to Canadian faith communities, was that then a positive transition?

Susan Lindenberger 03:30

Well, because the church I had my main connection with in Virginia was a very liberal, educated... They were mostly college professors... it wasn't such a jump. But there was a lot of implicit racism.

Katherine Gear Chambers 03:55

Did you find that was still the case in Canada? That there was some sort of a tight, sort of a whiter community in the Canadian church? Or did you find that it was more open to conversation and to dialogues than your home in Charlottesville?

Susan Lindenberger 04:14

In Blacksburg, yeah. Charlottesville I left when I was six months old. So Blacksburg was my real home. What was the question? [laughter]

Katherine Gear Chambers 04:26

So you were seeing that there was quite a lot of implicit racism in your faith communities in the States and I was wondering if that was also true in Canada when you first came, or if there was more of an openness to dialogue?

Susan Lindenberger 04:41

I think there was more openness here but not more than there was in the church I belonged to in Blacksburg. The church there went through a study on racism and the Christian response to it, and then there was a Session meeting in which dad started the questioning to the left of the president of the university and went in reverse order and asked everyone to say how they were voting and why.

Katherine Gear Chambers 05:12

Oh my god.

Susan Lindenberger 05:13

And everybody voted to integrate not only the church, but the Boy Scout troop and the day school. And at that point, the president of VPI got up and walked out of the room.

Katherine Gear Chambers 05:26

Oh, my goodness.

Susan Lindenberger 05:27

Oh, yeah. And left the church.

Katherine Gear Chambers 05:29

Did that pass, though? And were they integrated?

Susan Lindenberger 05:34

Did what?

Katherine Gear Chambers 05:34

Were they integrated in the end, like, was that a successful vote?

Susan Lindenberger 05:38

They welcomed – yeah. They – Black minister of the AME church, his son came to our Boy Scout troop. His daughter was in the day school, I believe. And the American Association of University Women, when they accepted his wife, they were no longer allowed to meet on the VPI campus, so they came and met with our church.

Katherine Gear Chambers 06:07

Right. Okay.

Susan Lindenberger 06:09

But I wouldn't say the church was fully integrated.

Katherine Gear Chambers 06:12
No. It's a long road, a long journey.

Susan Lindenberger 06:15
Yes.

Katherine Gear Chambers 06:19
So you were brought up in – sorry remind me the Baskerville? Baker -

Susan Lindenberger 06:25
Blacksburg, B.L.A.C.K.S.B.U.R.G. Blacksburg; it's where there was a terrible assault on students and faculty – gosh, 10 years ago, where a guy shot 23 people. I mean, it was one of the early mass shootings.¹

Katherine Gear Chambers 06:47
Oh, that's horrific.

Susan Lindenberger 06:48
Oh, yeah. Anti-guns has also been one of my causes.

Katherine Gear Chambers 06:53
Absolutely.

Susan Lindenberger 06:54
I mean, I can shoot. I learned to shoot, but I would mainly shoot the great – what was he called, the Great Green Giant? Big Green Giant on pea cans.

Katherine Gear Chambers 06:59
[Laughter] Right. Yes. I know the giant, yeah.

Susan Lindenberger 07:07
The only living thing I ever shot was a muskrat that was – I mean a groundhog – that was digging holes in a farmer's field, and he was afraid his cows would break their leg.

Katherine Gear Chambers 07:20
Oh, I see.

Susan Lindenberger 07:21
And so I got it with one shot. But that was the last time I ever shot anything alive. It upset me.

Katherine Gear Chambers 07:28
Yeah, I can imagine. That would not be easy to do. Not the same as the Big Green Giant.

¹ Added by SL after interview: On April 16, 2007, a shooter killed 33 VPI students and staff.

Susan Lindenberger 07:35

So enough of my childhood.

Katherine Gear Chambers 07:38

So you came to Canada, (1974) and you joined the church and you've been very, very involved in the church since then. Can you remember, or talk about some of your volunteer and work commitments in the church and how you became involved?

Susan Lindenberger 07:57

Volunteered with the church or in the church?

Katherine Gear Chambers 08:01

Either.

Susan Lindenberger 08:02

I mean, I volunteered right after I graduated from college. I have volunteered to work with the World Council of Churches Volunteer Service with Refugees in Germany, in Berlin, and then in Austria, where we were working with the children of refugees who were stuck in Austria. That was an international group and I'm still in contact with a couple of them.

Susan Lindenberger 08:35

Volunteer activities here – well, I've worked with the Girl Scouts and Brownies through churches, though that was an Anglican Church. I've done a fair amount – it's hard to say what's volunteer and what was part of my paid job, because I've done a lot through presbytery and conference, [and] in the national church with First Nations issues. I was a witness with a number of United Church, and other people, for the Alberni Indian Residential School trial, which lasted three years. And so once it moved to the Vancouver courthouse, I would sit and take notes.

And then we organized lunches that were brought in by various congregations. I put out a blurb online, asking congregations if they would sign up to do a lunch, and we really had no idea whether anybody would come the first time. And they did. And the rule was no lawyers could be present. And the church people who were doing the lunches were told after they finished serving to go sit with the First Nations people, but to listen; that's hard for me. No defence of the church, none of this “Well, we thought we were doing it for the best of reasons.” So that was educational for us. And at the very end people got up. Charlotte Sullivan particularly got up and made a very gracious thank you, an acknowledgement of what we'd done. And I stayed in touch with several of those Alberni survivors for a number of years. The dress I'm wearing is my button dress.

Katherine Gear Chambers 10:50

I noticed. It's beautiful.

Susan Lindenberger 10:53

It's got buttons all the way down. It started with just buttons for the Alberni plaintiffs, and the black button is for one who committed suicide during them. Well, it was very, very stressful to go back and talk about this little boy being gotten up in the middle of the night, right?

Katherine Gear Chambers 11:17

Yeah.

Susan Lindenberger 11:18

And so I started sewing buttons on for every First Nation story I heard. I got permission, and one guy wouldn't give permission. One guy pulled a button off his shirt right then and there. And gave it to me. Somewhere I have, oh, close to 300 buttons.²

Katherine Gear Chambers 11:38

Oh, it's beautiful.

Susan Lindenberger 11:42

It's heavy in both senses of the word... Because it represents a tremendous amount of pain.

Katherine Gear Chambers 11:45

Oh, absolutely. And very symbolic as well, because that is pain that we wear that it's our responsibility to wear, by listening and receiving that. Could you talk more about that time for the church, and for United Church based community, and how that part of our history influenced how we see ourselves as a church?

Susan Lindenberger 12:16

When I would do workshops, both on the residential schools and on land claims, the almost uniform response I got was, "Well, it's time for them to move on. Them." And "We didn't do that. That was somebody else. That was a long time ago." "Well, we settled this land, we civilized this land, we Christianized as this land." So there was a lot of defensiveness, and even anger that the church was doing this. Though, most people – particularly when we did the blanket... Are you familiar with the blanket exercise?

Katherine Gear Chambers 13:05

Yes, I haven't done it, but I am familiar with it.

Susan Lindenberger 13:07

Right, right. Well, the first time I did it, it was so powerful. I had tears in my eyes, you know, to visibly feel the land you're walking on being rolled up and taken away. And that, generally, made a huge impact on people, particularly if there were First Nations people who participated and then talked about their experiences. So yeah.

Katherine Gear Chambers 13:38

Yeah.

² Added by SL after interview: 163, actually.

Susan Lindenberger 13:41

And I can't remember – there was a lot going on at the same time, the Woodward's squat was happening at the same time – which was people who had been told that the old Woodward's building would be used for social housing, and then finding that and it had been sold for upscale stuff. And so a lot of – and largely First Nations people – but a lot of homeless people formed a camp around that. This was in September, October, November, December, [2002] and the weather was terrible. And they ran out of food. And so I helped organize food runs. We had one woman from our church who fixed Thanksgiving dinners. I mean, they had five or six turkeys and somebody else brought mashed potatoes – I mean, you know, they did a real Thanksgiving dinner.

I got a call one night – this was fairly early on in the squat, saying, “They've taken our toilets. They say we don't have enough toilets for the number of people we have down here, and we desperately need port-a-pots or they're gonna close the whole camp down by tomorrow.” And so I called Shaughnessy United – what was the other one? And Ryerson United, and my own church, Dunbar and said, “We need three more port-a-pots down there. And they cost \$700 – whatever they cost.” And [snap] just like that, you know, and so the truck rolled up and installed the toilets, and they couldn't close them down. That was very satisfying. I became known as the potty lady at that point. [laughter]

Katherine Gear Chambers 15:33

That's a wonderful legacy to hold, really. [laughter]

Susan Lindenberger 15:35

Yes.

Katherine Gear Chambers 15:40

How did your experience being raised in the States as someone who's active – or was raised by parents active in the civil rights movement, and being raised in a community of social justice – how does that influence the way that you approached conversations such as the Indian Residential School dialogue, and the role of the church, in that? And in other social justice movements?

Susan Lindenberger 16:02

That's an interesting question. I can hardly think about pre-COVID, you know.

Katherine Gear Chambers 16:10

I know.

Susan Lindenberger 16:14

Part of the influence is in letters I write, emails I send to politicians, both here, but primarily in the States. I am almost totally focused these days on defeating Trump. And frankly, I'm afraid. I'm afraid of what could happen. The last night of the Republican convention in front of the people's White House, that they usurped as a backdrop, reminded me of the Nuremberg rallies. Trump didn't spit and shriek the way Hitler did, but his message was very close. He

stoked fear. He said, "Give me the power and I will fix things the I've – well he didn't – yeah the way I've fixed things so well, the last four years."

So, my American blood has sort of boiled up in the last four years. I'm involved with a group called Americans of Conscience. We get a list every week of letters we should write, or actions we should take. I'm afraid I'm being more American these days. I'm very proud of my Canadian citizenship. That was, it took me ages to get it because Jim had a sabbatical – every three years, we were away for six months – and that meant I never accumulated enough days within a five-year period – or whatever it was. And I finally wrote a letter that said, "I'm 10 days short this time. I hope there's someone with the sanctified common sense to realize I've been a good Canadian. And I've appended three pages of things I've done to work with my community, my country." And so my whole family came the day I received my citizenship. I was extremely proud.

Katherine Gear Chambers 18:29

Yeah, absolutely.

Susan Lindenberger 18:30

And I take part in political action here.

Katherine Gear Chambers 18:35

In terms of the church, and your sort of political role in the church, have you learned something from your upbringing in the United States that sort of has transferred over to how you've been involved in the United Church and the social justice movement?

Susan Lindenberger 18:53

Just that we're called to seek justice. The thing about – to do justice, the next part is frequently translated: love mercy, or something – kindness. [Micah 6:8] And actually, the Hebrew means "to honour your covenant relationships." And so we have a covenant relationship, for instance, with First Nations. We ought to have a covenant relationship with nature. We have a covenant relationship with the poor and the dispossessed, with women, for goodness sakes.

The church has a horrible history with women – with some notable exceptions – but one of your questions in the questions you sent me was a defining moment that made you aware of... gender inequality. One I remember from the United Church, is when I was first working as a staff associate. If you worked 15 hours, you got benefits. You got medical benefits; you got a housing allowance. So churches would hire you for 14 and a half hours.

Katherine Gear Chambers 20:01

Oh my God.

Susan Lindenberger 20:27

Oh, yes.

Katherine Gear Chambers 20:28

Yeah. I mean, it still happens, but...

Susan Lindenberger 20:32

I imagine, but I mean, to me, that was a wake up. And I wasn't the one who noticed it. You know, someone – a group of staff associates, of women in ministry got together. And it was pointed out, and I went back and straightened things out.

Katherine Gear Chambers 20:53

Good.

Susan Lindenberger 20:57

And then [I was] subjected to very patriarchal, paternalistic attitudes from a couple of my colleagues. Interestingly enough, not the most conservative of them. The one who was opposed to gays and lesbians for being ordained – very conservative on that – but he never put me down personally. But a couple of the others sure did.

Katherine Gear Chambers 21:38

Yeah, do you find that your experiences of sexism influenced your political and social justice work in the church – like having that personal experience of what it is to be marginalized and oppressed? Did that influence the way that you walked?

Susan Lindenberger 21:56

Oh, yeah. I was early on tapped to be part of the BC Conference Sexual Abuse Committee. And it goes through several names (it was Misconduct by Clergy, and so forth and so on). We had some training here; I did further training with Marie Fortune in Seattle. And I think one of the very early cases in B.C. involved my colleague at Dunbar at the time. And I had two members of the congregation say he had acted inappropriately toward them – but nothing on a scale – nothing that would be 10, you know. And then gradually, I was contacted by people who had been sexually involved with him, people who were less high in the hierarchy, you might say.

Katherine Gear Chambers 22:15

Right.

Susan Lindenberger 22:19

And so we brought charges against him. And he reacted very strongly and organized the church to get rid of me. And it was a very painful time. It took us five years. I kept trying to give him give him a little rope. But he eventually hanged himself. And I don't mean that literally.

Katherine Gear Chambers 23:41

Oh God.

Susan Lindenberger 23:44

The first time, presbytery set some very strict things that he had to accomplish. The second time, they interviewed him, a year later; he had not accomplished the things. But that presbytery group said, "Well, he tried. He tried to do these things." Well, he hadn't done them!

One of them was to apologize. I sat in on two of those apologies and they weren't apologies. They were, "Well, my mom died when I was 14."

Katherine Gear Chambers 24:17
Oh God.

Susan Lindenberger 24:18

Yeah, exactly. And, and he never took accountability for what he had done to the women. And I was charging him for professional misconduct in undermining my job. And we finally got him delisted. And at that time, his lawyer said, "You know, he plans to go into counseling."³ And I nearly had a heart attack and said, "You know, putting him one-on-one with vulnerable women would be the absolute worst move he could make." So I think he really retired at that point.

Katherine Gear Chambers 25:03

Oh, good. Oh, gosh. Do you see that those conversations around accountability and taking responsibility, would – sort of were helpful for the church and for – especially white women in the church? Then entering conversations around race and social justice in situations where we needed to learn to recognize our own – to take accountability and to recognize our implication in that?

Susan Lindenberger 25:35

Well, I think part of the racial puzzle is – and this is very true in the States, and I think also true here – and I may, I may be showing my implicit racism here – we tend to worship – not all of us – we tend to worship very differently. And to really feel part of a congregation, you need to feel the worship speaks your language. And I think it's very hard for us to do that. I even noticed it in the workcamp in 1963, that different ones of us led the worship differently, different evenings and different mornings. But it seems strange.

Katherine Gear Chambers 26:43
Yeah. It is a different conversation.

Susan Lindenberger 26:49

I think we're strongest when we join together on some sort of justice action, or some sort of humanitarian action. I think we do very well there. But in fact, I've found that *between* religions. We worked out here with the three churches that eventually amalgamated to become the Peninsula United Church, with the Muslim Association here, and attended a number of sort of "get acquainted and find out something about one another" meetings and sponsor a Syrian family, through the sponsorship program. And that was a good connection. My doctor is Muslim, and she's... we don't talk religion very often. But I value that contact.

Katherine Gear Chambers 27:54

Points of connection... In terms of your education and vocational choices coming to the church, how did you end up becoming a worker, like, a paid worker for the United Church, rather than a volunteer?

³ Added by SL after the interview: Counseling, not for himself, but as a counselor.

Susan Lindenberger 28:12

Well, I had been a director of education in the United States, at churches in Richmond, Virginia, and in Baltimore, Maryland. Quite different churches. The one in Baltimore was one church in two locations, and there was a suburban location, but it had come from an inner-city location, and so we worked in both places. I remember the Scottish minister and I would go out and jump in the car after the suburban service and drive downtown – mercy we weren't killed! – and conduct services in there. And we had an integrated Sunday school down there, that was interdenominational. And I was down there when Martin Luther King was killed. And Baltimore was one of the cities where there was burning of the inner city. And I remember sitting Palm Sunday with the [Black] janitor. He and I were preparing the palms and talking about what a terrible thing had happened. So when we came here, Jim was at the Vancouver School of Theology. We were attending Ryerson Church. After about a year, the minister, Alan Reynolds, asked if I would come to take the place of the staff associate who had retired. So that's how I got involved.

Katherine Gear Chambers 29:58

...Involved in church, right. Can you talk a bit about your role models throughout your life, both in and out of the church?

Susan Lindenberger 30:08

Well, as I said, my mother was a very strong role model and we clashed violently. She was a strong justice person. It's interesting, all four of my great-grandfathers fought in the Civil War, on the wrong side, on the southern side. Well, they were all from South Carolina.

Katherine Gear Chambers 30:36

I know it's our history too.

Susan Lindenberger 30:40

At least two of them owned slaves. I mean, to me, you know . . . fortunately, my parents somehow got – worked through that, got over that. Yeah. Dad's implicit racism would show through when he became senile. But generally, they were a very strong example for me. Certainly, in holding the bonds of family tight. And being deeply involved in the church. And also their love of nature.

One of my strongest role models, was a man named Wybe Kroontje. Wybe was from the Netherlands. As a teenager, he'd been in the Dutch Resistance, he'd been put in a concentration camp. He survived because the older men, the older people in the camp said, "You're young; you have a chance to get out of here." And they gave their food to him, or some of it, you know, so that he had enough to survive.

He came to the US, I think it was in '58 or '59, when the floods happened in the Netherlands. I can't remember dates. And he became the senior high youth advisor. He stood up to this president of the university. He taught at the university. He recommended books for students to read – that had nothing to do with agronomy, which was his field – but had to do with civil rights, with justice, with philosophy. And he said to me one time, "Susan, you must always ask questions." And Wybe was very dear to me. I used to babysit their child. And he founded a

retirement village with stages for different stages of aging. And he was very proud of that. So he was very important to me, I think those probably were my two most important role models.

Katherine Gear Chambers 33:16

So was – sorry is it Qootje?

Susan Lindenberger 33:22

Kroontje, yes.

Katherine Gear Chambers 33:24

Kroontje was one of your role models, in terms of social justice work and activism, and you talked about him urging you to ask questions. How has that influenced the way that you've gone about your own work in the church and otherwise?

Susan Lindenberger 33:41

Well, when I can make myself slow down and think, I try to ask questions about: Why am I doing this? What should it look like? What's the outcome? What's the exit strategy? [Laughter] And how does being a Christian affect how I go about whatever it is I'm doing? And sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes it doesn't. He – Wybe's courage in standing up – especially in front of that president at VPI – standing up against him when he said, “You can't do this or you can't do that. You can't take your youth group to the Black church,” for instance. And Wybe said, “Are you speaking to me as a Christian? If so, you need to understand that this is part of my Christianity. If you are speaking to me as your employee, you have no business asking about what I do in my church.” I mean, he really stood up and that helped me, particularly during the sexual abuse case, because Wybe kept on, he just kept on. And it took five years to get that man out of the ministry. And I think that helped. Also what helped was reading the Psalms. And learning to meditate. I don't do it now. But then I would spend part of everyday reading the Psalms, particularly the Laments. Reading Isaiah, reading Hosea, reading Amos, those, much more than the New Testament, held me together. Now that may come from having slept with a Hebrew scripture professor for 56 years. [Laughter] But who's counting? So I've lost track of the question again.

Katherine Gear Chambers 35:56

Now I have too, I'm so immersed in your story! I think it was how Kroontje's encouragement to ask questions has influenced your work in the church?

Susan Lindenberger 36:08

I think I've answered that.

Katherine Gear Chambers 36:10

Yes, I think so. Can I ask what was it about the Psalms that spoke to you during those times of difficulty?

Susan Lindenberger 36:17

'Specially the ones that talk about feeling deserted, feeling that God has abandoned me. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Which then goes on to come back up.⁴ And the feeling that God is still there, even at the lowest points. "If I descend into hell, even there, thou art there."⁵ Yeah, I revert sometimes to the King James version of my very early youth.

Though, I certainly supported the re-translations. Particularly the language that is inclusive in the Hebrew and the Greek, that has been in the King James Version – was masculinized. And I mean, I took Greek, I have a nodding acquaintance with Hebrew. And so I can look at those words and I can say, this doesn't mean "he"; this means "we."

Katherine Gear Chambers 37:40

Yes. Language is extremely powerful.

Susan Lindenberger 37:43

Yeah.

Katherine Gear Chambers 37:44

So, going back to your involvement in a church you listed in the bio form a few things I just wanted to revisit. You were very actively involved in BC Conference, with women in ministry, the inclusive language kit. You've already spoken about the task force on the residential schools. Was there anything else you wanted to talk about in terms of committee work?

Susan Lindenberger 38:14

I think one of the most frustrating things I ever did in the United Church of Canada, was being president elect, and then president of Conference. And this was at a time when – particularly a couple of people – were trying to bring in what's called the Carver model of policy governance. And I thought it was done in a very surreptitious way. We had a pile of papers in front of each of us on the executive and we were told not to look at any but the very first one, and I thought, "That's treating us like kindergarten kids." Of course, I looked at some of the others, and the first policy was quite innocuous. I don't remember what it was, but it was quite innocuous. But some of the others I felt, ran directly against the form of governance of the United Church, the conciliar form, where the executive – the group of people elected from out there – and democracy is messy.

And so you've got all these people coming in, both at the conference level, and certainly at the General Council level – which I attended a few times. Where you've got people from the Maritimes, to BC, to Alberta – very different agendas, and sore points, you know, and yet it's in the thrashing of those out that you come to a decision that doesn't satisfy everybody, perhaps, but at least is a consensus. Whereas I felt the Carver model turned the executive into wordsmiths who wrote policies. But the CEO, the executive secretary, was where the power was. So that it wasn't the executive who decided what our response to the residential schools would be. If, you know, they might write a policy that says, "We need to be nicer to the residential school survivors." But – oh, and they all had to be written in negative language,

⁴ Added by SL after the interview: Psalm 22:1, 24: For He hath not despised. . .the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face. . .ff KJV.

⁵ Added by SL after the interview: Psalm 139:8.

which I thought was ridiculous. Yes, every policy had to be, “We will not continue a system of residential schools,” not “We will work to clean up the mess of the residential schools.” They all had to be written in negative terms.

Katherine Gear Chambers 41:10

Do you know why that was?

Susan Lindenberger 41:15

There was an explanation given. I did not find it very satisfying.

Katherine Gear Chambers 41:19

Yeah, no kidding.

Susan Lindenberger 41:20

And then the power lay in the hired executive secretaries. And we clashed over that. And Jon Jessiman, who was the lawyer for BC conference, took me aside during one of the breaks, and he said, “I agree with you, but I've been told because I'm hired to be the lawyer, I've been told I can't speak.” And I said, “I find that totally unacceptable.⁶ I am the President of Conference. I chair this meeting.” I had to fight to chair the meeting; the first time I walked in to chair a meeting, the Executive Secretary was sitting in the centre of the table. Now, that's a power position, and we try in the United Church not to have clear hierarchical positions, but that's a power position. So the next day I made sure I got there early enough to establish my position. Now, that sounds petty, but I wanted to be the one running that meeting.

Katherine Gear Chambers 42:22

Of course.

Susan Lindenberger 42:23

And I called on Jon a couple of times. Because I knew he also felt we were going astray. But I lost that battle, I lost that battle. And maybe for good reason. But I feel the United Church I came into, and I know things change, the United Church I came into in 1973-74 was a powerhouse. Conference had Anne Searcy doing the children's section. And she got me on to that right away. And we did things, we did good work. We had a Justice Committee that was on fire, we had an Outreach Committee, that was working in the inner city, that was working in the north. And I know the days when the Prime Minister, and – the name's gone out of my head – the head of the United Church, would get together and have tea and work things out. Those days were long in the past.

Katherine Gear Chambers 43:44

Right.

⁶ Added by SL after the interview: Jon was also on the executive because his presbytery had appointed him.

Susan Lindenberger 43:44

And so I'm an anachronism. I'm sorry, that we have lost the action that we used to take. Now, I have to also admit I am not in touch with that. I have – I attend church very rarely. I have a chronic back condition that makes it very difficult. But it's not that primarily that keeps me away. I have totally lost contact with what Conference and General Council are doing. I know we've got declining membership, and that means declining money, so we can't do the things we used to do. I do understand that. But I miss it.

Katherine Gear Chambers 44:40

What do you think might have led to these declines in action and in membership, and how can the church maybe take a shift in who it is or what it is, in order to once again have an energy and life behind it?

Susan Lindenberger 44:54

I have no idea of how we now reach younger people. Young adults, particularly. But young adults start out as children and teenagers. And I don't know. We have to become technologically brilliant, because that's where young people are. I just don't know. I don't feel we go Pentecostal –

Katherine Gear Chambers 45:29

Oh shoot... Hello? I'm so sorry about that. That was on my end my laptop -

Susan Lindenberger 47:06

You sort of froze and disappeared.

Katherine Gear Chambers 47:09

I know. I'm so sorry. My laptop completely crashed.

Susan Lindenberger 47:13

Oh, okay. Well, I'm glad it was you and not me, because I wouldn't have known what to do.

Katherine Gear Chambers 47:18

I'm sorry. I'm glad we're back now. The last thing I heard you say was that the solution isn't to go Pentecostal, but to find a way to bring younger adults into the church.

Susan Lindenberger 47:34

Yeah, I think we have to become more technologically savvy. But I don't know. I know we've got online services, but they're probably not the sort of online things that 18 to 30 year olds– COVID complicates everything.

Katherine Gear Chambers 48:01

Yeah.

Susan Lindenberger 48:04

I think a lot of us are just waiting until that goes away until we finally got a vaccine. Yeah, I make masks.

Katherine Gear Chambers 48:12

I can see that. I love that.

Susan Lindenberger 48:14

Yes. That's a Halloween mask.

Katherine Gear Chambers 48:16

I was about to say, it looks like candy corn. [laughter]

Susan Lindenberger 48:24

No, the Peninsula Church has a display outside, and for a while it was a cross that they invited anybody to come put flowers in. I think they've done painting stones with messages, and that sort of thing.

Katherine Gear Chambers 48:41

Oh yeah, beautiful.

Susan Lindenberger 48:42

I don't know. I do not know. You know, I feel ashamed sometimes, that with my background in Christian education, which was most mostly working with adults who worked with the children, not working directly – though, I did a lot of hands-on stuff as well. I just don't know; probably my son would know better. He's of that generation and has the skills. I don't have the technological skills. I don't get around. I don't have – you know, my memory goes. So I do not know the answer to that. I think at times the church becomes a small, faithful community that perseveres. And that that's more important than being a huge church that has big loud services and simple answers to the hard questions of life. And spreads COVID. [laughter] Super spreaders.

Katherine Gear Chambers 49:59

Yes, we've seen that.

Susan Lindenberger 50:02

Yeah, my energy these days seems to go into my family. And I do – I miss my grandchildren – we get together occasionally with either my son and his family or our daughter, yeah, their family. We get together – though once school starts in person, I'll be very cautious about doing that. Yeah. I think our faith has something to do with how we go back to school, and how we make decisions about that. And I think love of neighbour is key to that, because many children, particularly in Surrey, come from multi-generational families. And you put a child in school, and maybe children don't get real sick from it, but they can carry that home to a grandparent. Yeah. And as a grandparent I'm aware of that. [laughter]

Katherine Gear Chambers 51:01

Of course.

Susan Lindenberger 51:03

I don't know how I got off on that train. But we were talking about trying to renew the church. I think at times the church does focus down and tries to remain faithful and tries not to become so ingrown, that it can't blossom again.

Katherine Gear Chambers 51:21

Yes. I agree with that.

Susan Lindenberger 51:24

I'm sure churches are out there doing good stuff now. You know... I don't know, but I'm sure that churches responded to the hurricane recently. I know that.

Katherine Gear Chambers 51:50

Yeah, the role of the church and faith in society is definitely changing.

Susan Lindenberger 51:55

Yes. And I don't have the answers to that. My energy goes into family and into defeating Donald Trump right now, because he scares me. He scares me, not just for the United States, but for the world.

Katherine Gear Chambers 52:10

Absolutely. Yeah. For good reason.

Susan Lindenberger 52:13

I've found that authoritarian grab for power is something that is popping up all over – it reminds me of the 1930s. Now I didn't live during the 1930s, but I love history. And I've read a lot of history. And the way authoritarians came to power in Italy, and in Germany. And well, in Japan, there always was a hierarchical structure. But I see that, and Jim tells me I'm exaggerating. But no, it just smacks of Nazism to me.

Katherine Gear Chambers 52:55

Yes, it does.

Susan Lindenberger 52:58

So I think my faith has something to do with the fact that I try to write or at least make one phone call a day to benefit some sort of political agenda. And most recently, it's been to Canada about the COVID restrictions, and about the school openings, you know. But I average one a day to the United States, and they tend to come in bursts. All right, there are six senators that I feel I have a right to write and three representatives.

Katherine Gear Chambers 53:40

Yeah. Are you still an American citizen?

Susan Lindenberger 53:42

Yeah, I've kept – it is very expensive to give up your American citizenship, financially. And if Trump is re-elected, I may give it up. Except it's important to keep it, to fight him.

Katherine Gear Chambers 53:56

Yes, it is.

Susan Lindenberger 53:58

I've always felt you should be politically active where you live. And so I've tried to do that locally, and provincially, and nationally. And I still vote in the States. My ballot hasn't come yet, but it will go back the same day it comes.

Katherine Gear Chambers 54:20

Oh, yeah. [laughter]

Susan Lindenberger 54:23

Oh, he's trying to destroy the post office.

Katherine Gear Chambers 54:26

Yeah, he – well he's kind of succeeding, too. Like – it's a serious threat, what's happening with the post.

Susan Lindenberger 54:33

So there. At the moment, I'm a political animal. I hope it's motivated by love of neighbour and love of God.

Katherine Gear Chambers 54:43

Yes. I think that we've touched on many of these questions, but I just wanted to return to one in case you wanted to add to it. What were some of the important issues, joys and challenges of your life, or project or work you're especially proud of?

Susan Lindenberger 55:02

Okay, certainly the sexual abuse stuff. The First Nations stuff. [pause] They tried to build a casino here in South Surrey. And I got involved, because to me, casinos prey on the weakest members of society, they pull money away, they hook people, it's an addiction. And so I feel love of neighbor compels me to repel casinos. And so I worked through the No Casino Surrey group and worked on the team that wrote the very long, well-researched, asking questions, you know, submission that we gave to City Council, and then I spoke to the Council. If I can flip back to the States –

Katherine Gear Chambers 56:18

Absolutely.

Susan Lindenberger 56:19

In '64 – '65, I was working in South Carolina as campus minister. And this was during the major civil rights movement. And our college conferences had always been segregated.

Katherine Gear Chambers 56:46

Segregated, yeah.

Susan Lindenberger 56:48

“Lily white and clean, oh.”⁷ And I worked with a few people to get it integrated. And that was during the Selma march. And I really struggled with whether I should go to Selma, or whether I should stay and see the South Carolina conference through, and I don't know whether it was cowardice or whether it was commitment to the job that I was doing, but I stayed in South Carolina. And we had a conference and I remember, one college student, a woman, stood up – white – and said, “I live in Charleston, South Carolina. And our N...” – “N...,” I think, was the word she used – “...don't want to go to our library or swimming pool.” A Black woman stood up and she said, “I'm from Charleston, South Carolina. I would love to have access to the public library and the swimming pool.” And that to me, you know... I hope we all learned something from that.

The church I worked in, in Richmond, Virginia, one of the – it had a Robert E. Lee chapel. And they didn't have the Confederate flag hanging in it, thankfully.

Katherine Gear Chambers 58:13

That's a low bar.

Susan Lindenberger 58:14

One Sunday, a young Black guy came early and was sitting down towards the front. And when he turned around, you could just see his face almost become white. He realized he was the only Black face in that big church. Well, of course, yeah. This was a prominent downtown Richmond, Virginia church, formerly capital of the Confederacy. And I got to him, and another person got to him first and welcomed him. And he said, “I understand you need someone to help” – there had been an announcement made – “with the junior high group.” And I say, “Yes, we'd love to have you working with the junior high group.” And when it became known that I had a Black guy working with the couple that were doing the junior high fellowship, one of the Reynolds – either the aluminum Reynolds or the tobacco Reynolds, and I can't remember which because both of them belonged to that church – so money and power on the Session, came into my office and said – basically he didn't say it in these words, “You got to get rid of that N...” And I said, “Well, would you come help with the junior high group?” And he just looked totally taken aback. And Richard stayed with the junior high group.

Katherine Gear Chambers 59:51

Good.

Susan Lindenberger 59:56

So, I feel good about standing up to that. Because I knew we were going to be leaving at the end of the year.

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:00:04

Nothing to lose.

⁷ Added by SL after the interview: a quote from Beatrix Potter, Mrs. Tiggywinkle.

Susan Lindenberger 1:00:04

I didn't have a lot to lose.

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:00:07

Was there anything else you wanted to add in terms of works and projects and joys and challenges in your life?

Susan Lindenberger 1:00:20

At Dunbar Heights I had an extremely good working relationship with George Searcy for six years. George would very patiently call me on how long I would go on when he allowed me to speak, and things like that. But we had an excellent working relationship. The person who followed him, I was asked to help him make his language more inclusive, and he didn't appreciate that. One of the first things I did when he came to that church was to tell him about your grandfather, Irv [Gear].

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:01:02

Really?

Susan Lindenberger 1:01:02

. . . who was terminally ill at the time, and I said, "There are two people you need to call on and establish a relationship right away." And Irv was one. And it was one of the women also was terminally ill. And the minister got very close, I think, to them. And also to the couples group, the Couples Club, at the church, who were very powerful, and they became very much his support group. Now I remember going and talking with your grandmother [Sheila], at one time, and telling her some of the things that I knew. And I said, "There's a lot more, but it's bound by confidence. I can't tell you. But you need to know that this guy... this is at the point when they were trying to get me fired. And not Irv and Sheila, particularly –

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:01:57

No, I understand; the congregation as a whole.⁸

Susan Lindenberger 1:02:12

And so that's sort of a personal connection that we had, and a demonstration to me... I mean, I was right. He needed to be in touch with those people early on. But I wasn't cautious enough about how he could manipulate groups, which is how he had manipulated women.

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:02:37

Yeah.

Susan Lindenberger 1:02:39

So that's just a little personal... touch.

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:02:42

Anecdote. Yeah. Did you find – or what was your experience of the group and or community of women in the United Church over your life?

⁸ Added by SL after the interview: Definitely not the whole congregation.

Susan Lindenberg 1:02:51

That was wonderful. The women in ministry were wonderful. We had everything from a couple of the professors from Vancouver School of Theology, to low totem pole folks like Staff Associates, and we got together and – that was early on where we talked about justice in pay and benefits. But we did retreats together. Yeah, they were very supportive. We kept in touch with one another; we encouraged one another.

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:03:31

Good. I know that there were, you know, different roles that women had in the church and paid ministry, and lay ministry, and work and volunteer. Was there ever any sort of hierarchy or tension between those positions? Or was there an understanding that everyone was contributing?

Susan Lindenberg 1:03:50

You mean, within the women's group?

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:03:52

Within women, just women – themselves. Or broader.

Susan Lindenberg 1:03:58

No, I didn't particularly. I know, one of the people who I would consider higher in the hierarchy than me, came and advised me not to continue the action against my colleague. And she said, "Well, it's affecting your health. I can tell." You know, I was stuttering. I was pale. I was sick a lot. And she said, "Did you know that you're entitled for three months health leave?" And she said, "I advise you to take it." Which was really good advice. But another one said, "You know, you should drop this. It's not good for your health." And I just felt, "I've got my teeth into this." Well, I tend to be persistent, or stubborn, or both. Yeah. And it was important to me, and to the women I represented women I supported. Because there were many more than the ones who were willing to come forward and testify.

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:05:15

Absolutely.

Susan Lindenberg 1:05:16

That – I mean had the courage of the three women who testified. I was just, yeah, stunned by.

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:05:24

Yeah. So you found that there was strong support for you, and for the women involved in that – for the most part.

Susan Lindenberg 1:05:36

There was mixed support. I found there were those who felt, that for my own sake, I should back off. And there were others, particularly people from Dunbar, like Susan Pond and Sue Burns, which may be names to you...

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:05:52

Oh, yeah. We interviewed Susan. She spoke highly of you.

Susan Lindenberger 1:05:55

Right. Well, they would stay in touch with me almost weekly, Susan Pond would come down and leave asparagus, or tomatoes, or whatever. Pat Burns also was very supportive. Yeah, I found support across the spectrum from Dunbar when I was doing that sex abuse case. And I felt his support was mainly that older Couples Club with whom he'd become entrenched. But I found some elderly people who would come into my office and say – I mean, elderly to me at that time...

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:06:45

I understand, yeah.

Susan Lindenberger 1:06:47

"I don't know exactly what's going on. But I know you. I've known you for six years, and I've trusted you," you know. And that meant a lot. But it was – you know, my kids finally said, "You need to stop talking about the [(name redacted)] mess, Mom. And so you know, Jim was a good support. He was skeptical at first that there was anything to it. But after he met – particularly one of the women – he realized that I needed to do that. My father said I should stop. And he said, "It's making you tense. It's making you sick." And I said, "Dad, I never saw you stop with the civil rights stuff." And [laughter] so he shut up. [laughter] Is there anything else you want to ask me?"

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:07:45

I'm just going back to the list and seeing if there's anything. Oh, I missed the question, what effect has your class, race, and sexual orientation had on your life and your participation in the church?

Susan Lindenberger 1:07:56

Well, I'm the great-granddaughter of slave owners of people who had prominent positions. My dad was very proud of how prominent his ancestors were. Yeah. And so, I get caught frequently with my own embedded racism. I can remember one meeting in Washington, D.C. And I spoke to a Black couple who had, I thought, made a great presentation, and said something about how wonderful it was to hear well-educated, Black people speak on this, and they just tore a strip off me. And I thought, "Yeah, I'm racist." You know, it's there.

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:08:49

Yeah.

Susan Lindenberger 1:08:51

And so you fight against it, you work against it, you try to become more aware of it. I've known two trans people at VST. One made an astounding change. Transitioned very, very well. The other one [sigh] was pathetic.

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:09:20

In what way?

Susan Lindenberger 1:09:22

And so I tried to have – I tried to work with the – I can't get all the LGBTQ+ question mark. But I don't pretend to understand it very well. I once – one of my things I did while I was doing the [(name redacted)] mess was transcribing the journals and letters of an aunt of mine, my dad's older sister, with whom he was very close. Well, it turns out she was bi. And that just all of a sudden helped me understand myself, about what a spectrum sexuality is. I mean, I've seen it in myself over the years. What a spectrum it is, not the bi...

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:10:26

Not the binary? Yes. Yes.

Susan Lindenberger 1:10:29

And so that's been an education for me. That's been an experience for me. And I don't think that had anything to do with the question you asked me.

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:10:41

Oh, I think so – the effects your class, race and of sexual orientation.

Susan Lindenberger 1:10:46

I mean, I come from not a wealthy family but what was a semi-prominent family in the South, and I'm aware that I sometimes won't throw my weight around. try to control things. I have tried to educate myself on the polar opposites and the spectrum of all the things that I am. I think I made that sentence correctly. Let me just see if there's anything...[pause]. Yeah, the churches I've served at have been predominantly white, middle class, educated. And so they're a reflection of me. I have attended Black churches in the South. I went to one of the funerals, it was eye-opening. I have gone to Oral Roberts' healing services to try to experience what that's like. I'm afraid I have mostly contempt for that bunch of people. I am absolutely flabbergasted by the support of white evangelicals for Donald Trump. And yet I understand that their two things that they define their Christianity by is anti-abortion and against any sexual diversity.

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:12:42

Yes.

Susan Lindenberger 1:12:44

But I don't understand that. I can explain it but I don't understand how Christians can support him. But I remember how the German churches had Nazi flags, you know? And joined the Party. So, it's a struggle with what the church aligns itself with sometimes. And sometimes that's stuff I've aligned myself with; I try to be a counterbalance. But I'm tired. I'm not just retired. I'm tired. Yeah. And so I channel what energy I have into my garden, my family, and political action at the moment. I'm not very involved with church right now.

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:13:51

Yeah. I think sort of just two, maybe two more questions. We've been talking a lot about sort of social justice and race, and you mentioned it, LGBTQ+ queer community, and all of that, how can the church create a safe space for everyone who is involved in our community? Do you think?

Susan Lindenberger 1:14:16

I think one thing is putting out the rainbow flag, putting out the symbol. I think that symbolizes that we're safe for broader than just sex and gender identification. I think if our leaders take visible stands, audible stands, on the issues of the day, that may say something about our communities being safe spaces, but we have to live it. We had a guy at First United Church [White Rock] who welcomed everybody who came in the door, who was right there, and spoke to them, and made them feel welcome. We need to be a welcoming community. And it needs to go beyond the door, the greeting at the door, we need to become interested in other people's lives, in their pain. Even if we just listen to it, that's something. We need to be visible on – when there are demonstrations. Whether it's for cancer, or, you know, Terry Fox Run, or support for the hospital care. We need to have a banner that says United Church of Canada in pride parades.

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:14:28

Yeah.

Susan Lindenberger 1:16:05

You know, we need to be visibly present. We need to write letters to the paper. I ~~hadn't~~ haven't done that recently. But I've certainly done it. We need to keep contact – well, that's part of the welcoming. When new people come –one of my jobs at Dunbar was to go call on every new person who came in the fall. And I hated doing it. I had to sit in the car and steel myself to go in and talk to people I didn't know.

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:16:05

Yeah.

Susan Lindenberger 1:16:50

But I got so I enjoyed it. And how we do it with First Nations, I don't know. Communities? Well, we live in White Rock. We live right near the Semiahmoo Reserve.

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:17:10

Yeah.

Susan Lindenberger 1:17:12

And White Rock threatened to cut off their water. And so I wrote letters about that, and called people about that. And Surrey, thank goodness, came to the rescue. Not White Rock, but Surrey. I've been in meetings in which Harley Chapell, the band leader (doesn't like being called chief), I've been in meetings with him, and I really respect him. But I haven't done much recently. And I just try to stay healthy, at the moment, you know. I get out and walk every day, and make my masks, I've done hundreds.

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:17:58

Yeah. Yeah.

Susan Lindenberg 1:18:00

Yeah. I try to encourage the grandkids. They're really the parents – well our son has decided he's not sending his boys back to in-person school at first. Particularly with the uptick. Our daughter last week, was going to send them the first week, and now she's wondering what she should do. I've made masks, multiple masks for all of them. [laughter] So, I think keeping up your physical health is a faith action. You know, so I try to do that. Yeah.

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:18:50

And there's one other thing I was just curious about. We've talked about your role models throughout your life; is there anyone now either in the church or in the world, beyond the faith community, who you look up to or learn from or are inspired by?

Susan Lindenberg 1:19:05

Marion Best was a huge role model for me. Your mom is one. But Marion represented someone of intelligence, who was articulate, who spoke and stood up for things that I feel are faithful. And so I suppose she would be one of my United Church role models. George Searcy was in a different way. George could talk to almost anybody. George had the common touch. George was salt of the earth. He was aware of his flaws and helped me point out some of mine. [laughter] And because Anne Searcy I knew before I knew George, I really admired in her work for education. Not just for education in the Lower Mainland, but further. And I learned a lot about curriculum from her, and about organizing. Yeah, yeah. So Anne was important to me.

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:20:38

Are they still people who continue to inspire you and who you know, continue to honour?

Susan Lindenberg 1:20:48

I continue to honour... Tim Stevenson is one. Gary Paterson is one.

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:20:52

Yes.

Susan Lindenberg 1:20:54

Gary particularly. Well, they were both students at VST. And Tim and I took Old Testament together.

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:21:05

Really? Oh, awesome.

Susan Lindenberg 1:21:07

So that was interesting. He looked over – my Bible has my name stamped on it, on the cover. And I was sitting in the back row, as was he, and he looked over and said, "Lindenberg, are

you kin to the professor?" [laughter] And that was in the days when I wore blue jeans and had pigtails. And so I said "Yes, rather" then didn't go into it. But yeah, that was fun.

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:21:39

That's Tim.

Susan Lindenberger 1:21:41

Yeah, I learned a lot about the faith, the persistence of gays, from those two men.

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:21:53

Yeah.

Susan Lindenberger 1:21:57

Yeah. Bob Smith and I did a lot of First Nation stuff together. We went up to Ahousaht for a healing circle, one time. And, boy, that was gut wrenching. I mean, we sat in this big circle of about 200 First Nations people who went around the room and told of their abuse. That's where a lot of these buttons came from, that Ahousaht healing circle. And he and I, and the guy from the RCMP, and a Catholic priest were there to offer apologies.

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:22:39

Good.

Susan Lindenberger 1:22:40

Past actions, yeah. And that was just hard on me.

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:22:49

On everyone, yeah.

Susan Lindenberger 1:22:51

Yeah. Yeah. So Bob Smith, you know, and, and I saw his clay feet occasionally, you know, as I'm sure he saw mine. And that just makes people more real, you know, that you don't have to be perfect in order to make a difference. Wybe Koontje once told me when I was feeling on my high horse, he said, "Susan, take this cup of water. Put your finger in it. Now take it out and see how much of an impression you have made." And I learned something from that, you know. I had a very high opinion of myself to cover up for low self-esteem. And he worked on both of those. He took me down when I needed to be taken down. And he always lifted me up.

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:23:50

That's a beautiful, beautiful role to have in someone's life. Yeah. I think we all need a bit of that. [laughter]

Susan Lindenberger 1:23:58

Yeah. And we need always to be mentored, and we need always to be a mentor to someone else. And there are a few of the kids who were in confirmation classes that I led, who will get in touch every now and then. There are a few people who went through the [(name redacted)] mess with me, who have been in touch, and when I went to the Dunbar – Dunbar is

amalgamating with Ryerson – and I went to the last service at Dunbar, and just had the most – just a beautiful warm welcome from people who had known me then.

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:24:43

Yeah, that's beautiful. Is there anything else that you wanted to say or add or share?

Susan Lindenberger 1:24:54

Jim, my husband of 56 years – and I don't know how he has stood it – it took us six years to get married. Because I wanted to travel, there were things I wanted to do. And then he was studying in Israel for a year. He came back and I thought he was – I was really scared, here was this stranger coming back after a year. And he has stuck with me through some real messes. One of the things I have learned through a long marriage is forgiveness, how important it is to forgive one another. And how important it is when things get rough, to keep going. Sometimes that has to be on parallel paths, but to keep going until they come back together. And he has been my rock. He has been my rock.

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:26:00

That's beautiful.

Susan Lindenberger 1:26:04

He's ordained. But his ordination in the Presbyterian Church was for the teaching ministry. That's what he's done. When I was at Dunbar, I had a group of women come to me and say, "We want you to take a couple of years off, and to go back to seminary and to get your ordination." And when the laity speak like that, I pay attention. And I thought about it very, very hard. And I thought about what I missed by not being ordained. And the freedom I had by being a staff associate. Freedom, but no guarantees, no stability. And so I decided to stay in lay ministry. And so for me, when I was President of Conference, one of the biggest – I don't know what word to use – one of the most important actions I was able to take was to serve communion.

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:27:14

Oh, yeah!

Susan Lindenberger 1:27:15

Because that was the one thing I could not do as a non-ordained person. And so, to me, the sacraments are central. They are called sacred because they are, they are very important. Baptism is important. And I can do the laying on of hands for baptism, but I don't do actual baptisms. But to be able to bless, and serve the laity was very important to me. The love of neighbour, you know – and the neighbour can be in the same house as you. And sometimes that's the hardest person to love. Domestic distancing can be a lifesaver. But love of neighbour, broadly defined, is something that I have tried to live.

I don't know how you're gonna patch all this together. I hope you're a quilter Do you quilt?

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:28:23

[laughter] I don't, but I do love patching stories.

Susan Lindenberger 1:28:28

Okay, okay. Sometime I want to know about you. Who are you? What do you do?

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:28:34

Oh, I'll pause the recording, unless, is there anything else you wanted to add?

Susan Lindenberger 1:28:38

No.

Katherine Gear Chambers 1:28:39

Okay, well, then I'll pause the recording.

[End of interview]